

# Canada Lynx

## Description:

Usually solitary, Canada lynx are a classic species of the "north woods." Like most cats, they hunt mostly at dawn and dusk but have been known to be active during the night. This species is uncommon in Idaho and was recently listed as "threatened" by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Long Ears, Big Feet

That doesn't look like my pet cat! The Canada lynx is characterized by its long black ear tufts and a short, black-tipped tail. The ruffs of facial fur on the cheeks are similar to a long, pointed beard which surrounds its white chin. Its dull yellowish-brown fur is mixed with black hairs and is very thick. Lynx have dense winter coats that provide insulation and warmth throughout harsh winter conditions. Their large feet, which are padded with thick fur, let them walk on top of deep snow much like snowshoes. Their paws are as large as the mountain lion's, but their bodies are three to five times smaller than the mountain lion's.

## Not a Bobcat

The only other native cat that resembles the lynx and is also a close relative is the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*.) Although these two cats are similar in size, the lynx's rear legs are quite a bit longer which makes the lynx appear taller. The lynx has less-noticeable spots and larger ear tufts than the bobcat. Also, the tip of the bobcat's tail is black above and white below, while the tip of the lynx's tail is all black.

## Friendly Forests

Lynx are typically found in northern forests with many fallen trees and dense thickets that serve as cover for stalking prey. Lynx prefer remote, wild forests with little human disturbance. In Idaho, this species needs forests with lots of new growth while looking for food and mature forests for denning. Good foraging habitat provides the browse and cover that makes good winter snowshoe hare habitat. When lynx are inactive, they den in a hollow tree, under a stump, or in thick brush.

## Runnin' Rabbits

Snowshoe hares are the preferred food of the lynx, but lynx will also eat squirrels, grouse, rodents, small birds, and occasionally, a young deer. It also has been known to feed on other small and large mammals found dead. When lynx do not eat all their kills, they save and cover it with snow or leaves.

The Hudson Bay Fur Company in Canada had years of data showing the relationship between lynx populations and snowshoe hare populations. The data showed the strong predator-prey relationship of the two species. Lynx are dependent on their prey, and their prey are dependent on the twigs, grasses, leaves, bark and vegetation of the dense forest.

## Mortality

The wolf and mountain lion are the main predators of the lynx. The most common causes of death are actually starvation of kittens and hunting by humans. Humans are a predator because they value the lynx's long, silky fur. Since the lynx is now a threatened species on the Endangered Species list, it is protected from humans. There is also a chance that a lynx could be mistakenly caught by bobcat trappers, however, Idaho's trapping regulations have comparative information to help trappers avoid lynx.

## Reproduction and Offspring

Adults scent-mark their territories by urinating and defecating on logs, stumps, and bushes along their path. The chemistry of their urine changes at different times of the year to send a variety of signals. During breeding season it attracts mates, and at other times, it may send a message relating to territory. Lynx breed from March to April and every year, or sometimes every two years, two to four kittens are born. By only eight to ten months of age, they have their adult coats. The kittens usually stay with mother for the first year while they learn to hunt. In years when there is a shortage of prey, breeding is usually delayed. Today, the only known reproducing lynx populations are in Montana, Washington and Canada.

## Range/Distribution

As of August 2002, Canada lynx occurred primarily in forest habitat: the Cascade Range of Washington and Oregon; the Rocky Mountains from Montana, Idaho, and Oregon south to Utah and Colorado; the western Great Lakes region; the northeastern region from Maine south to New York and Pennsylvania and east to Massachusetts. A recent reintroduction program has begun in Colorado, and the Lynx has been listed on the Endangered Species List as a "Threatened" species.

## Threats

Loss of habitat by logging, road construction, even fire suppression is a huge threat to lynx populations in Idaho. Most would not guess that winter recreational activities like snowmobiling and skiing could impact the lynx. These activities pack down snow and give other predators easier access to habitats covered in deep snow that previously only the lynx could inhabit. Now, coyotes and bobcats are beginning to move into these areas and compete for food and space. The Department of Fish and Game is currently collaborating with the USFS on predicting lynx habitat in Idaho by conducting hair-snagging surveys throughout the state.



Canada Lynx  
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Footprint

*No Map*

Distribution Map

1. **Species:** Canada Lynx
2. **Scientific Name:** *Lynx canadensis*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Weight: 15 to 30 lbs.  
Height (at shoulder): 18- 23 inches.  
Length (body): 31 to 40 inches.  
Length (tail): 3-5 inches.
5. **Diet:** Small to large mammals, birds, carrion.
6. **Young:** 2 to 4 young every 1 to 2 years; called kittens.
7. **Lifespan:** 10-15 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Mammalia  
Order: Carnivora  
Family: Felidae
9. **Hunted In Idaho:** No
10. **Hunting Link:**